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ABSTRACT

College Teaching today is in many ways a primitive profession, for there are no standards to insure that only qualified practitioners enter the "guild." The prevailing stereotypes give the impression that only those with certain formal credentials are qualified as teachers. Teachers should be selected on the basis of natural communicative abilities rather than credentials alone, and should be further trained in the art of classroom presentation. Those who have responsibility for the conduct of higher education are to be severely indicted for their neglect of classroom teaching as one of the arts. If graduate student teachers are examined, it will be discovered that they do things quite differently than would be expected. In a study at the University of Rochester, it was discovered that there was serious misunderstanding among the administration, faculty, and student teachers about the role of graduate students in the instructional process. However, a large number of undergraduates were "delighted" with the role that the graduate student teachers were playing. The student teachers expressed a desire for more training and supervision in teaching than they had received, and were very open to change. The graduate student, having just come through his own undergraduate program, is a great resource in the campaign to improve the quality of undergraduate instruction. (DS)

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THE GRADUATE STUDENT AS TEACHER

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Of all the arts, crafts, and professions, college teaching is in many ways the most primitive. To be a plasterer these days requires an apprenticeship program with its own admission requirements, its own standards for progress, and its own union to prevent those who have not gone through the investiture rites from earning a livelihood exercising the art. If there be such a thing as art in college teaching, it goes unrecognized. For there is neither a guild to insure that only those adequately acquainted with the art may exercise in the field, nor a system of training to pass on to others the secrets learned by predecessors. The literature in higher education is devoid of a disciplined approach to classroom teaching.

Not only is there no recognition (and consequently no reward system) of the existence of the art, but there is an entire family of stereotypes generated to assure that those who now practice the stately art of college teaching have developed credentials of an entirely different sort. The rules of the game today in higher education are that the only good teachers are those with doctoral degrees, that those who are still struggling to complete a dissertation are as yet not quite competent to teach, at least not on a full time basis, and that those who have fewer than two or three years of graduate education are completely unqualified to stand in front of a college class. This system of stereotypes has been established with great care and has been successfully transmitted with sufficient veneration to undergraduate students, so that they will exclaim with indignation and outright pain if they discover that any substantial portion of their instruction is being managed by a graduate student. Even the undergraduate

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students have accepted this general proposition. This is quite surprising for they have not accepted the other half of the proposition, namely that one must make a scholarly contribution to merit consideration for tenure positions as undergraduate teachers.

I would rather not discuss the general issue of publish or perish, nor ask the question whether it is necessary for a person to continue a program of creative scholarly work in order to be a good classroom teacher. However, if you are willing to admit that there is a small number of outstanding teachers who have not published very much, and that there is a modest number of persons who have published a great deal who do not achieve acclaim from the students in the classroom, then we may move to the next proposition, which is that research and scholarly endeavor do not in their own right improve quality of teaching in the classroom. If one wishes to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom, one should do so by selecting persons (trained in their fields, of course) who have certain natural talents for communicating and provide them with sufficient exposure to the experience of others who have succeeded in the classroom to enable them to capture some of the art of classroom teaching.

To paraphrase Alexander Pope, "True ease in teaching comes from art, not chance, as those move easiest who have learn'd to dance."

If we take these points as given, one may review the way in which graduate students are used in many institutions around this country and must come to the conclusion that there is a certain madness in the whole enterprise. In most universities and colleges the classroom is a sanctum sanctorum; we assume that any person who goes into the classroom to teach obviously has qualifications to do so. We do not question the instructor and, in our suspension of disbelief, believe that somehow or other nothing we could say or do would help him improve.

Having waltzed around the main part of the problem that we are to discuss today, let me state my essential belief about the entire problem. It is that those of us who have any responsibility for the conduct of higher education deserve to be severely indicted for our neglect of classroom teaching as one of the arts. Indeed, it is one of the areas of scholarly endeavor that we have most seriously neglected. We have treated classroom teaching as a mystique rather than a skill or an art. We have assumed that anybody who knew something and was "any good" could manage a classroom. We have assumed that the more senior the man the more competent he was as a classroom teacher. And in the same spirit of irrationality we have assumed that whenever it is necessary for us to turn over a class to a part-time person or to a graduate student, that no one would be able to tell the difference. Therefore, it was unnecessary for us to do anything extraordinary to be certain that the classroom was managed well.

The purpose of this panel discussion is great, because it is critical for us to take a look at what we are doing and then behave differently in the use of graduate students. By merely looking at the problem, we will discover many things we had not observed before. We will note that the graduate students behave differently in the classroom than we assumed. We will discover that graduate students use their time differently when assigned to teaching responsibilities from what we believed. We will find that the undergraduate students say something different about the use of the graduate students than we believe they are going to say. We will find that it is possible to generate programs to improve the quality of instruction of graduate students, and that graduate students, unlike us, are quite willing to examine some of the evidence about features that improve the quality of classroom teaching. They are willing to engage in activities that will improve the quality of their work in the classroom. More than this, we may well discover that there is an essential role that graduate students can play in the instructional program that none of us

who are more senior and who have different views of life would be able to match. I believe we could demonstrate with ease that there is a unique role in instruction that the graduate student can play.

I am on this panel not as a historian nor as a graduate student, which I gather should be obvious to all, but rather because I was instrumental in generating a study of the way in which graduate students were used for instruction in undergraduate programs in a university. The study was done at the University of Rochester, where it was not necessary for graduate students to be used for teaching merely because of the pressure of students, but where the assignment of graduate students could be made on the basis of any obvious value they might have in the instructional program. Contrary to common belief, we found a large number of undergraduate students who were absolutely delighted with the role that graduate students played in instruction on our campus. We also found that we had made some serious errors in the assignment of graduate students in certain roles, and that often we did not know that we had made those errors because neither the administration nor the department was aware of the resistance to the use of graduate students in particular domains. We also discovered that the knowledge that departments had about what their graduate students were doing was frequently quite different from the estimate the graduate students themselves made of what they were doing. We discovered a serious lack of communication and understanding about the role of graduate students in our instructional programs. We found a great interest among graduate students in having a better induction into the instructional process than they had received, and a desire for more supervision than they were getting. We also discovered that it was fairly easy to make modest changes in assignments and in the roles for graduate students in teaching, which

affected substantially the attitudes of the graduate students and of the undergraduate students about their roles.

As a sort of stranger in this group, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this symposium for another reason. It is, that I am convinced that we must do many things to improve the quality of instruction in colleges and universities. I am convinced also that the innovations that we decide upon will come not from the senior persons in the field but from those who are junior. I look upon the graduate student as a great resource in our campaign to improve the quality of undergraduate instruction. The graduate student has just come through his own undergraduate program. He sees, from behind the instructor's desk problems with which he has just struggled as a student. He is more likely to be willing to shake up the system in order to make the entire program of instruction more effective for our students.

What those of us in positions of authority must now do is to find ways so that we can use the great competence of our undergraduates, our graduate students, our junior faculty, and our own colleagues to work for a large number of programs of innovation. Programs of instruction in higher education relating to methods, to content and to relationships between student and faculty must be made more effective. Not only are we obligated to listen to the younger persons entering the field who have some suggestions to make in this regard, but we have the responsibility to stimulate them to speak up. Maybe then we will begin to treat college teaching as important, as improvable, and as rewardable.